The Production of Metal Containers for Essential Foods and For Specialized Military Uses in 1945

I. The Problem

A. The can manufacturing industry faces a problem of increased production requirements in 1945 in a generally restricted labor market. It is called upon to produce containers for perishable and essential foods for military, Lend-Lease and essential civilian requirements. In addition, the industry is required to manufacture specialized containers for supplies required by the military and other governmental agencies. An increase in the pack of perishable fruits and vegetables is anticipated in 1945, probably an overall of about 10 percent. It must be borne in mind that the Armed Services and government agencies will procure 50% to 60% of the perishable fruits and vegetables canned through the medium of a set-aside order.

The can manufacturing industry will be required to put into production approximately 400,000 tons more steel than last year for the manufacture of metal cans for food. This represents a 20% increase over 1944. This increase (almost wholly military) is the direct result of military and lend-lease demands for metal cans for foods such as rations, meats, coffee, cereals, beer, evaporated milk, fish, fats and oils, spices and other foods needed for military operations in the Pacific theater where other types of packaging are not satisfactory. The metal food cans for military and other governmental agency requirements are principally the same size and style as those required for perishable fruits and vegetables, and therefore for the most part must be manufactured in the same plants and on the same equipment.

Due to the tin conservation program, large quantities of tinplate must now be coated with lacquer or enamel in order that the food will be given adequate protection from spoilage. To the greatest extent possible substitute tinplate should be coated outside for corrosion protection. The Armed Services require large quantities of cans camouflage coated in order to give added protection from outside corrosion in war theaters. This places an added burden on the industry facilities and increases labor requirements as well as time required for manufacture of cans.

Due to the seasonal nature of the canning industry and the fact that the can manufacturing industry must stockpile cans to meet the seasonal demands, at least 55% of the steel requirements

must be put in production during the first six months of the year. Approximately 2,500,000 tons of steel will be used in 1945 for the production of metal cans for essential food; of this quantity approximately 60% is required for military and other governmental uses. Because of the seasonal nature of the canning industry, can manufacturers are required to reach peak production during the second and third quarters of the year; in fact, the second quarter is of primary importance because they must produce a backlog of cut parts (ends) to enable them to produce a backlog of containers for the seasonal pack. (See Requirement schedule attached.)

B. To meet the above requirements, the can manufacturing industry must immediately begin building a stockpile of packers' cans for storage in advance of the canning season. The manufacturing facilities of the industry are not adequate to meet the seasonal requirements of the canning plants unless such a backlog is built up in advance of the operating season on perishable fruits and vegetables. Because of the heavy demand placed upon them during the first quarter for food cans for military use they have been unable to build the necessary backlog of cut parts. A large quantity of their present employment had to be used to manufacture military requirements.

Present indications are that military requirements for food cans will continue through the second and third quarters of the year on a higher level than the first. This means that unless additional labor can be recruited the can manufacturing industry will not be able to produce a backlog of packers' cans for the perishable fruits and vegetables with the net result that canners will not have cans for canning the seasonal crops when they reach maturity. Some seasonal packs will start in approximately 60 days. Because of the transportation shortage, sufficient railroad cars may not be available at the peak of the season and it will be necessary to attempt to ship cans as far in advance of the season as possible so that canners will have sufficient quantities of cans during the packing season. Thus, immediate action is necessary to avoid food losses.

C. The Can Manufacturers Institute estimates that some 12,000 workers must be recruited for the industry between March 1 and September 30 of the present year. This figure makes no allowance for turnover employment; however, it is indicated by the Institute through experience that a total of 39,000 persons will have to be recruited during this period in order to meet the additional requirements. This requirement is mostly unskilled labor, both male and female, because of the use of automatic machinery on

packers' can making lines. About 60 percent of the packers' can manufacturing facilities are situated in Group I labor market areas as shown by the accompanying table.

D. Plants situated in less stringent labor market areas do not have sufficient production capacity to relieve the situation even if operated continuously. A substantial amount of production has already been transferred from critical areas to less critical areas to ease the burden, but the facilities are not available in other areas. Facilities cannot be moved to other areas without disrupting and substantially reducing present production. Present facilities in their present location will be sufficient if additional manpower is available. Transportation of the product to end points of utilization would create shipping problems which are already overburdened.

E. Because of the concentration of the production facilities of the industry in differing labor market conditions, any remedial action on manpower recruitment must be taken on an area rather than a national basis.

II. Suggested Action in the Field by Claimant Agencies (WPB, WFA, and Procurement Branches of the Armed Services)

A. Field representatives of the foregoing agencies should visit the industry plants in their respective areas which are producing sanitary cans and specialized products for the Armed Services. These representatives should discuss the problem in the light of the following factors:

1. The extent to which production is being hampered by labor shortages, and the degree to which production facilities are not being fully utilized because of such shortages.

2. The steps which the industry is taking to meet its manpower problems.

3. The difficulties encountered in recruiting labor for the industry, based on consultation with WMC representatives in the area.

4. A determination, after the foregoing action, of whether present manpower priority ratings for the industry are sufficient for effective manpower recruiting purposes.

5. If higher manpower priorities are necessary, the immediate action to be taken by representatives of the claimant agencies in presenting requests for consideration of the problem by APUC and AMPC.

III. Suggested Action by Area WMC

A. The Area WMC will doubtless wish to take the following action:

1. Review the estimates of needed manpower submitted by the Can Manufacturers for the industry, in the light of employer orders on file and known plant labor requirements.

2. Determination of extent of utilization of manpower facilities by the industry, and possible remedial action.

3. Determination of what labor can be recruited locally, either full-time or part-time.

4. Determination of possibility of using prisoners of war or imported foreign workers.

5. What publicity methods can be used in meeting the problem.

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